**09 Interest Groups**

Print It and Get Going

**Study on the Go**

Print out these study cards and take them with you. It's the perfect way to get that last minute cramming session in before your exam.

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The National Rifle Association (NRA) is one of the most successful interest groups in American politics.

**What We Learned**

***1. Why do people join interest groups?*** The free-rider barrier to group membership is the concept that individuals will have little incentive to join a group and contribute resources to it if the group’s benefits go to members and nonmembers alike. Professor Mancur Olson says that groups attempt to compensate for the free-rider barrier by offering selective benefits that go only to group members, including material, purposive, and solidary incentives.

***2. What types of interest groups are active in American politics and what are their goals?*** An interest group is an organization of people who join together voluntarily on the basis of some interest they share for the purpose of influencing policy. Business groups are concerned with government actions that affect their profits, costs, and operations, such as tax laws, environmental regulations, labor laws, and government contracts. Organized labor favors government policies aimed at making it easier for unions to organize and backs programs and policies designed to improve the quality of life for working people and their families. Professional associations are concerned with public policies that affect their members. Agricultural groups want government loan guarantees, crop subsidies, and the promotion of farm exports. Racial and ethnic minority groups share the goals of equality before the law, representation in elective and appointive office, freedom from discrimination, and economic advancement. Interest groups that are part of the religious right are concerned with such causes as abortion, same-sex marriage, and prayer in school, whereas groups associated with the religious left focus on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, immigration reform, environmental protection, and poverty relief. Citizen groups support government policies that they believe will benefit the public at large. Advocacy groups seek benefits on behalf of groups of persons who are in some way incapacitated or otherwise unable to represent their own interests. Members of cause groups care intensely about a single issue or small group of related issues.

***3. What strategies and tactics do interest groups use to achieve their goals?*** Interest groups employ a variety of tactics in an effort to achieve their goals, including electioneering, lobbying, creating public pressure, protest demonstrations, litigation, and political violence. Interest groups endorse candidates for office and form political action committees (PACs) to support them financially. They employ professional lobbyists to communicate the viewpoint of the group to government officials. They may organize public relations campaigns to promote policies they favor or organize protests to broaden and deepen their support. Some groups file lawsuits to achieve their goals, whereas others organize protest demonstrations or engage in political violence.

***4. What factors determine the relative strength of interest groups?*** A number of factors affect the relative strength of interest groups, including alliances with political parties, alliances with members of Congress and executive branch officials, public opinion, unity among groups representing the same cause, opposition from other groups, and resources.

**Tips for Success**

**Read carefully:** When you take a test, be sure to read each question closely. Many students lose points because of careless mistakes caused by not following instructions or failing to read test questions closely.

**Key Terms**

**527 Committees**

organizations created by individuals and groups to influence the outcomes of elections by raising and spending money that candidates and political parties cannot legally raise

**Access**

the opportunity to communicate directly with legislators and other government officials in hopes of influencing the details of policy

**Advocacy Groups**

organizations created to seek benefits on behalf of groups of persons who are in some way incapacitated or otherwise unable to represent their own interests

**Anti-Clericalism**

a movement that opposes the institutional power of religion, and the involvement of the church in all aspects of public and political life

**Bundling**

a process in which an interest group gathers checks from individual supporters and sends them to candidates in a bundle, allowing an interest group to route more money than the group alone could contribute

**Card Check**

a method of union authorization that allows union organizers to collect employee signatures on authorization forms instead of holding a secret ballot election

**Cause Groups**

organizations whose members care intensely about a single issue or small group of related issues

**Citizen Groups**

organizations created to support government policies that they believe will benefit the public at large

**Electioneering**

participating in the electoral process through endorsements or financial support of candidates

**Free-Rider Barrier**

the concept that individuals will have little incentive to join and contribute to a group if benefits go to members and nonmembers alike

**Friendly Incumbent Rule**

a policy whereby an interest group will back any incumbent who is generally supportive of the group’s policy preferences, without regard for the party or policy views of the challenger

**Interest Group**

an organization of people who join together voluntarily on the basis of some interest they share for the purpose of influencing policy

**Lobbying**

the communication of information by a representative of an interest group to a government official for the purpose of influencing a policy decision

**Minimum Wage**

the lowest hourly wage that an employer can legally pay covered workers

**Political Action Committee (PAC)**

an organization created to raise and distribute money in election campaigns

**Right-To-Work Laws**

statutes that prohibit union membership as a condition of employment

**Trade Associations**

organizations representing the interests of firms and professionals in the same general field

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why are unions generally less influential than business groups? What are their policy goals?

2. How do interest groups attempt to influence election outcomes?

3. What impact do campaign contributions have on the actions of elected officials?

4. What approaches do lobbyists take to influence policymaking?

5. What factors affect the strength of interest groups?

**Interactive Activity**

**Visual Literacy: Federal Election Rules, PACs, and the Money Trail**

For decades, interest groups in the United States used Political Action Committees (PACs) to help candidates raise funds for their campaigns. Federal and state laws across the country prohibited many organizations from directly investing in political campaigns. PACs were intended to limit powerful interest groups by restricting fundraising methods and as well as the actual amount that could be donated to particular candidates. Over the last few years, interest groups have continued to participate in electioneering and traditional direct lobbying practices. More recently, interest group money has become part of the independent expenditure—indirect lobbying phenomena that has played an important role in the last two presidential elections. Is interest group money an inevitable component of modern elections? Should efforts continue to attempt to limit the impact of interest group money in the federal and state elections? In this activity, you will study charts and to explore the impact interest groups have on elections across the U.S.

[View Visual Literacy Activity](http://www.ablongman.com/cmsredirects/long_mypoliscilab_2009/vl.federalelectionsrules.html)

**“Talking About American Government” Podcasts**

Author Neal Tannahill discusses the most important concepts in this chapter

* [Interest Groups and the Judicial Process](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch07_interest_groups_judicial_proces.mp3)
* [Free Rider](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch07_free_rider.mp3)